

Doctor-author rues loss of personal touch

■ He treasures talks he had with patients

By Loretta Fulton
Special to the Reporter-News

Alongside the stethoscope, thermometer and bandages in Dr. Tom Hutton's black bag are a lifetime of great stories about the relationship between a doctor and a patient.

Hutton, a retired neurologist and professor at the Texas Tech School of Medicine, lives on his ranch

UPCOMING TALKS

The Texas Author Series at the Abilene Public Library, 202 Cedar St., continues March 28 with Pam Morsi, a San Antonio romance writer. Other presentations will be on April 11 and 25. All talks are free. Lunch is available for \$5, beginning at 11:45 a.m. The program begins at noon.

near Fredericksburg. On Monday he shared stories from his black bag at the first installment of the

2016 Texas Author Series at the Abilene Public Library.

Hutton cited passages from his book, "Carrying the Black Bag: A Neurologist's Bedside Tales." Like so many other things, the black bag is pretty much history, Hutton said, with few younger doctors carrying one. Instead, they rely on technology in the palm of their hand.

Hutton was introduced by Carl Trusler, a retired Abilene physician who was a classmate of Hutton at the Baylor College

See **AUTHOR, 5A**



NELLIE DONEVA/REPORTER-NEWS

Dr. Tom Hutton, author of "Carrying the Black Bag: A Neurologist's Bedside Tales," was the first featured author at the 2016 Texas Author Series at the Abilene Public Library.

AUTHOR from 1A

of Medicine in Houston. Both men graduated in 1972. Like Hutton, Trusler lamented the trend of relying more on technology and less on a hands-on diagnosis.

"There's more to caring for a patient," Trusler said, "than ordering another test."

Hutton's stories proved he agreed. Hutton said the stories in his book show that the doctor-patient relationship is a two-way street. It's not only the patient who gains valuable, even lifesaving, information from the doctor.

"It points out to me," Hutton said, "how much I learned from my patients."

Hutton's talk, like his book, was filled with both poignant and humorous stories. He told of an elderly patient with Parkinson's disease. The man no longer could farm or do much of anything. Answering

questions, the patient said he had trouble shuffling cards.

Hutton was curious about the statement but went on with his questions, including asking the man if he had seen any animals that weren't there. If so, the doctor would think the patient was suffering hallucinations and needed his medicine adjusted.

"Well, doc," the man said, "I see some dogs."

Then he told of three imaginary dogs coming to his house every day to play cards. That was something Hutton needed to know, and he realized the man wouldn't have told him without the conversations they had had.

"It brought home to me," Hutton said, "the importance of establishing a rapport with patients."

Before retiring, Hutton took several cruises with Parkinson's patients, serving both as their onboard physician and educator. One woman was in such bad shape that everyone was concerned. During the

cruise, she died, and Hutton had to call the family. He got the woman's daughter on the line and, in his best professional manner, informed her of the death.

"Well, we thought she would," the daughter said in her best matter-of-fact voice.

Shocked, Hutton listened as the daughter said her mother had lived a life filled with adventure — sky diving and riding a burro to the bottom of the Grand Canyon. She would not let the fact that she was nearing the end of her life keep her from taking a cruise.

"How wonderful," Hutton said, "that she took ownership of that disease and refused to give in."

In a question-and-answer session following the talk, a woman asked if medical school students today are learning the importance of touch and engaging in conversation with patients. Hutton said that regrettably, they are not.

"So," he said, "you need to teach them."